

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000576

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT, INR/NESA; NSC FOR
E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04-03-13

TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS PHUM NO JA PINR CE LTTE

SUBJECT: Leading Tamil politicians criticize Tigers in
courageous, but highly risky move

Refs: Colombo 551, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills.

Reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Two key Tamil politicians have
ramped up their criticism of the Tigers in recent weeks.
The politicians, V. Anandasangaree and N. Raviraj,
charge the Tigers with using strong-arm tactics in their
bid to control the Tamil community in Jaffna. The
course the two have chosen is a courageous one, but
risky, and, as of this point, they seem isolated in
their public stance. In the long-term, however, their
decision to oppose the Tigers could have important
ramifications for politics in the Tamil community. END
SUMMARY.

=====
Two MPs take a Public Stand
=====

2. (C) Two key Tamil politicians have ramped up their
criticism of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
in recent weeks. In highly unusual public remarks for
Tamils, the two, V. Anandasangaree and N. Raviraj, have
publicly underscored that they are independent of the
LTTE and do not have to listen to the group's edicts.
(Note: Anandasangaree, 70, is the leader of the Tamil
United Liberation Front, "TULF," and has been in
Parliament since 1970. He is from Jaffna. Raviraj, 40,
formerly mayor of Jaffna, represents the
Chavachchkacheri area in Jaffna for TULF. He has been
in Parliament since 2001.)

3. (C) Of the two, Anandasangaree's comments have been
particularly biting. Last month, for example, he
announced publicly that he did not see the LTTE as being
"the sole representative of the Tamil community."
(Note: It is a mantra of the LTTE that it is the "sole
representative" of the Tamils.) In February,
Anandasangaree also faced off against the LTTE, publicly
complaining about the group's (successful) effort to
prevent the ceremonial reopening of the Jaffna library.
(Note: In preventing the reopening, the LTTE clearly
did not want Tamil politicians, such as Anandasangaree,
to get the credit for the reconstruction of a cultural
landmark -- See Reftels.)

4. (C) In the meantime, Raviraj has also made clear his
disdain for the LTTE, announcing recently that he was
seriously considering running as an independent
candidate for mayor of Jaffna, his former job.
(Note: It is possible that long-delayed local elections
may take place in the north and east in June.) In
making this announcement, Raviraj was signaling that he
wanted out of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a loose
political grouping of Tamil parties which has forged
very close links with the Tigers since it was formed in
late 2001.

=====
Strong Views in Private, too
=====

5. (C) To discuss the developing situation, the
Ambassador met separately with Anandasangaree on
March 19 and Raviraj on April 1. In these meetings,
both men hit out in very, very harsh terms against the
LTTE. One core element of their points was the
(accurate) claim that LTTE cadre are often using
intimidation and violence against Tamils in Jaffna.
While providing few details, both men went on to accuse
the LTTE of assassinating Tamil opponents in Jaffna and
elsewhere. (Note: Per Reftels, Mission has picked up
several reports lately in which LTTE cadre allegedly
have killed informants working for the security forces
and other Tamils. These reports have not been
confirmed.)

6. (C) Another aspect of their criticism of the LTTE is
that the group is showing no respect for the TULF.

Raviraj remarked that the Tigers seem to believe that they have the "complete right" to control Tamil politics. He went on to note to the Ambassador that the TULF was the oldest Tamil political party and one of the oldest in Sri Lanka, and should be respected by the LTTE. In emotional tones, Raviraj also commented that the Tigers should now back off given that the LTTE-GSL war was in remission and let politics in the Tamil community play out its natural course.

17. (C) In his comments to the two politicians, the Ambassador underlined that he respected their courageous views. The U.S. had never accepted that the Tigers were the "sole representative of the Tamil people," and had also always argued that the Tamil community in the north and east deserved full democratic rights. The Ambassador commented, however, that the two would be wise to proceed carefully and judiciously. Both men took the Ambassador's point, adding that they were fearful of possible LTTE retribution and had spoken to the GSL to request additional security. As of yet, however, they had not been threatened directly by the Tigers. The Ambassador asked both men to contact the Mission immediately in case they received any such threats. (Note: For its part, as is its style, the LTTE has not commented publicly on the two men's criticisms, though some pro-LTTE elements have harshly hit out at them.)

=====
Isolated, So Far
=====

18. (C) At this point, Anandasangaree and Raviraj seem isolated from the mainstream of Tamil politics, and, as of yet, there is no indication that other well-known Tamil politicians are about to join them in their anti-LTTE stand. (Note: There are several former paramilitary parties that have historically opposed the LTTE. These groups, though they have some support, are not within the general mainstream of Tamil politics.) When asked, Anandasangaree admitted that few of the other TNA (including TULF) MPs supported his views, though he felt that some of them might do so privately.

19. (C) In a sign of the problem the two might have in gaining support, N. Sampathan, a TULF MP from Trincomalee with historically moderate leanings, has given no indication of wanting to join them. In an April 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Sampathan said he thought that Anandasangaree was being "too emotional" about things and "needed to act his age as a senior leader of the party." Anandasangaree, he added, had said some "unfortunate" things about the LTTE over the Jaffna library incident. To clear the air, Sampathan recommended that Anandasangaree go to the LTTE-controlled Wanni region and discuss his concerns face-to-face with the Tiger leadership. When asked, Sampathan discounted the possibility that Anandasangaree's life might be under threat from the LTTE.

110. (C) Sampathan also maintained a sunny perspective regarding the LTTE, in general. He said he thought the group's cadre were reacting well to peace and that they were maturing "after years in the jungle." It would take time until the group acted more as a political party and less as an insurgent army, but the transformation had already begun. Queried about reports of intimidation, Sampathan remarked that the Tigers could not be blamed fully for that, as they were fighting off the former paramilitary groups, which had used strong-arm tactics against other Tamils.

=====
COMMENT
=====

111. (C) The course Anandasangaree and Raviraj have chosen is a courageous one. It is also highly risky for the two given that several top leaders of TULF have been killed by the LTTE in the past. These assassinations include that of TULF leader A. Amirthalingham (killed in July 1989) and TULF senior MP N. Thirulchelvam (killed July 1999). It is possible that the ongoing peace process might afford the two men some protection in that the Tigers might be reluctant to kill high-profile Tamil opponents at this time.

112. (C) In the long-term, the decision by the two to oppose the Tigers could have important ramifications, especially if the ceasefire and peace process continue. In the past, when the war was on, many Tamils did not want to break community solidarity and criticize the group. In light of the current peaceful situation, however, many Tamils are clearly feeling less beholden. Although very few Tamils have taken the plunge thus far,

it is possible that Anandasangaree and Raviraj could be at the forefront of a movement that could point Tamil politics in a more constructive direction. END COMMENT.

113. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS